

Statement of
U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey, (D-MA)
Ranking Democrat, House Subcommittee on
Telecommunications, Trade and Consumer Protection
March 11, 1998
**Introduction of the
"E-Rate Policy and Child Protection Act of 1998"**

Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce the "E-Rate Policy and Child Protection Act of 1998. Mr. Speaker, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 contained a provision that I had battled for and advocated for many years. The concept was straightforward: make America's schools and libraries eligible for universal service funding so that these educational entities could receive discounted rates for telecommunications services. During FCC implementation of this provision, I coined the term "E-Rate" -- for "education rate" -- to describe a system of discounts for telecommunications services that would allow schools and libraries to enter the digital age and better prepare our citizens for the knowledge-based economy of the future.

As a nation, we did the job of preparing previous generations to compete in the Industrial Era. From the founding of our republic, the common school movement and leaders such as Horace Mann provided the impetus for the ideal that each and every American should be entitled to an education, regardless of economic status.

America cannot leave kids from middle class working families out of the knowledge-based economy and still hope to retain its economic standing in a fiercely competitive global environment. At the turn of the 20th Century, 10 of the 12 largest companies in America were natural resource companies. As we enter the 21st Century, the 10 largest and most rapidly expanding industries in the world are brainpower industries: telecommunications, computer software, microelectronics, biotech, material-science, among others. The E-Rate is an essential program for our country's economic future.

Now that the E-Rate program is being implemented, some concerns have been raised about access to material on the World Wide Web that is inappropriate or unsuitable for children. I have long believe that technology can often offer a solution to some of the problems that technology creates. Software filtering technology and other blocking technology can help to provide some protection in schools to shield children from inappropriate online fare. Other solutions may also mitigate against minors gaining access to Web sites that parents and educators feel are indecent and want to shield from young children.

I believe that the digital age will present both promise and problems. I also believe that we can embrace technological change, use it to empower our citizens and also face the challenges that technology poses for us. The purpose of the legislation that I am offering today is to ensure that local school and library officials think through the many issues of online access, and implement a policy for addressing access by children. This legislation will ensure that before schools and libraries obtain E-Rate funding in the future that they establish some policy governing access by minors.

Thank you.